

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER: Dialectical, Revolutionary, Feminist

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(This essay is dedicated to Sara Gomez's family, who welcomed me to their home in Cuba.)

Dialectics defined:

Dialectics, a Marxist philosophical concept deriving from Hegel, establishes the relation between human drives, ideas, and consciousness, on the one hand, and objective "reality," on the other, be that reality nature, social relations and structures, productive forces, or history. ¹The theory of dialectical materialism contains within it two integrally related and inseparable "sub-theories," or, more accurately, points of emphasis. One focuses on the movement and processes inherent in the external world, e.g., natural phenomena, modes of production, or social relations. The other approach focuses on the history and scope of human thought and posits dialectical thinking as both the most effective and realistic method of intellectual and political exposition.

Within the dialectical method of inquiry and exposition, as Marxist philosopher Bertell Ollman points out, the difference in where one begins leads to a difference in perspective, in the size and importance of the "factors" considered in the investigation or discussion, and in the relevance of the various ties known or found to be existing between those factors.² In film criticism, most of the time that the term dialectical is used, it refers to conflicting or interrelated factors. However, critics often use the word *dialectical* when the terms *interaction*, *conflict*, *abrupt contrast*, or *juxtaposition* would serve just as well, and the term *dialectical* loses the richness, complexity, and precision which it has within the tradition of Marxist thought. If I do not emphasize the notion of "interacting factors," it is not to diminish this concept's real importance. Rather, I wish to demonstrate that merely to analyze "interrelated factors" is to neglect one of the key aspects of both dialectical art and dialectical film criticism: elucidating the relation of human consciousness to historical and social process and change.

"People are confronted with a web of natural phenomena. ... Categories are stages in distinguishing, i.e., of cognizing the world, focal points in the web, which assist in ... mastering it" (Lenin, writing on Hegel).³

People will always feel dissatisfied with what is not. They constantly have new needs, emotional drives, and a subjective sense of what they want--in particular, a desire to control the conditions of their lives. They presuppose the existence of the external world as they act upon it to concretize their goals. They generate ideas and, over the centuries, develop rules of logic and science in relation to their need to act effectively in the world. Ideas--generalizations, conceptual thinking, and a sense of necessity or "law"--accompany all human perception, experience, and language. Although generalizations

must always seem poorer than the richness of the concrete, sensuous world, they are necessary to fully comprehend the concrete in all its relations and contradictions, in its process and movement. In return, the truth of ideas is proven by their adequacy in practice.

"Consciousness not only reflects the external world but creates it"(Lenin).⁴

Dialectical thinking assumes both the historicity of the thinker and the possibility of arriving at a relative truth. It assumes that intellectual functioning is purposeful and arises out of people's needs; the needs themselves change and will continue to change historically.

The concept of dialectics has been developed in the Marxist tradition by Marx and Engels, by Lenin in his philosophic commentaries on Hegel, by Mao in such essays as "On Contradiction" and "On Practice," and by philosophers and political scientists such as Henri Lefebvre and Bertell Ollman.⁵ In this tradition, Marxists have elaborated and demonstrated a process or method of theoretical, conceptual thinking which has as its end elucidating its object, the concrete world, in terms of that world's all-sidedness, contradictions, determinations, and necessities. Dialectics explains process and change.

An equally important aspect of Marxist dialectical thinking (this emphasis can also be found in Hegel) is that people will accept a given objective truth, will seize upon, use, and master a given concept, only when that truth, or theory in general, takes on its own vitality in human social practice. To give an example from my own life, because I participate in the women's movement the terms *patriarchy* and *sexual politics* have a complexity and conceptual force for me as tools for explaining both my own situation and women's oppression in general; but they explain very little for those unwilling to believe women are oppressed.

In Cuba, one often hears someone say, "Yo soy *revolucionaria/o*" ("I'm a revolutionary"), and the concept *revolution* has an explanatory power about social process which most Cuban people understand in detailed and sophisticated terms. Mass understanding in Cuba about social process derives from a broad consensus that the revolution must not only be preserved but nurtured, deepened and built. Because of this consensus and a general public interest in history, politics, and the dynamics of social change, cultural work and especially film production in Cuba takes on a new intellectual force. Filmmakers work with the confidence that they can elucidate and contribute to ongoing social process, and their work has a unique historical effectiveness because there is a fruitful, dialectical relation between audience, filmmaker, and film.

One Way or Another:

In its content, cinematic form, and relation to its audience, Sara Gomez's ONE WAY OR ANOTHER (Cuba, 1974/1977) is a dialectical film. It is a film made with a fine sense of the potentially close relation between art and people's lives and between art and social and historical change. It is also a feminist film. Rather than just look at women's lives under socialism, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER takes on a more complex task. It examines

Cuban revolutionary process from the vantage point of the neighborhood and the domestic sphere, and it depicts the ways that revolutionary change is and must be effected in terms of what people as individuals know that they want.

Internal to the film's narrative, the story deals in part with a love affair between a man born in a Havana slum, Mario, and a petite bourgeoisie woman, Yolanda, who has been sent to work in that area as a primary school teacher. Both characters are seen dealing with problems at work. Their reaction to work problems reflects their class background and has implications for their present and future intimate life. By focusing on these two characters, the film shows the complex relation between an individual's needs and degree of personal and social understanding (or, correspondingly, degree of false consciousness) and larger historical, social, and economic processes. The film emphasizes how people create both their own personal lives and their social world. Change comes from conflict and negation, from recognizing mistakes, from emotional interaction with and criticism from others, and from affection and collective support.

Every moment and aspect of the characters' lives is seen in terms of the complex social relations that form and condition them. In turn, each aspect of the characters' lives and each interaction between characters influences both their own future and that of others. The film traces how the internal dynamics of a single personality, family, or love affair are related to the larger social processes of the revolution, especially the institutions of education, urban planning, and work. Past history bears on the present, and what individuals do in the present is, in turn, history making and historically important. Both personal and social development proceed through cumulative change (here, slum clearance and building new homes) and through unexpected confrontations and leaps. The film presents Mario and Yolanda's affair as a "moment" of the whole of their culture and uses that love relation as a vehicle to examine the interconnections between social structures and possibilities for both personal and social change.

Characterization and narrative structure:

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER manipulates its narrative structure in many ways and offers us only fragments of characterization. The titles introduce ONE WAY OR ANOTHER as "a feature film about some real people and other fictional ones." In general, the film alternates between documentary and fiction, and it also often operates in what I shall call a mixed mode, especially presenting the fictional characters in a documentary-like way. The documentary segments mainly relate the history and social background of the "marginal" population of the port cities Havana and Matanzas and discuss how this previous slum population, overwhelmingly black, has not yet been totally integrated into the revolution. The fictional segments show two characters beginning a love relationship and facing personal conflicts at work. The protagonists work through and we come to understand the contradictions which are an integral part of their personal histories. Qualitative changes do occur in their lives. In the context of looking at a love relationship, we come to see how a community can work together and even lovers can challenge and help each other within a revolutionary framework so as not to repeat again and again old, outworn, destructive ways.

In addition to telling a love story, the film also traces extensively Mario's relation with an associate from work, Humberto. Both men have a limited social understanding--in Marxist terms, false consciousness. Both face intense social pressure to change but each deals with that pressure in a different way. The fictional sequences depicting this male friendship are structured much like the episodes in a Brecht play. Each sequence highlights the social context of a given moment of individual behavior or (false) consciousness and shows the social effect of individual choices. These two men are both shaped by their environment and held responsible for their behavior, and each sequence of the film in which they appear together is structured to challenge the ethic of machismo they cling to.

Humberto takes off work for five days to travel with a woman; he tells people at work that his mother is dying. His pursuit of personal interest results in his using others as means, thinking his real self resides outside work in leisure and sexuality, and not recognizing how personal and social interest coincide. He holds to an ethic of individualism and sees the needs and rights of others as limiting his pleasure. Mario knew of Humberto's plan and was not enthusiastic about it but did nothing. When the factory workers' council, on which Mario's father is an official, meets with the gathered personnel (played by real workers from a Cuban bus factory) to decide whether or not to discipline Humberto, Mario denounces Humberto in a fit of rage because he thinks Humberto has implicitly called him an informer.

This denunciation sequence opens the film, when we know nothing about the two men. The same sequence is repeated midway in the film, when we understand much more of Mario's position. Furthermore, the second version presents a key moment before the denunciation. Mario tries to leave the room as Humberto is giving his excuses. However, Mario's father, from the table in the front of the room, forbids his disgusted son to leave the crowded room, telling him as a co-worker in the factory that the meeting is not over yet. By implication, this suggests that the father also suspected that his son knew something about Humberto's delinquency but that the son had suppressed that information out of an ethic of manly friendship.

What is at stake here and what we see very clearly the second time we see this sequence is how both Mario and Humberto are ideologically bound by their own conceptions of their identity. Mario is confused and cannot formulate public criticisms; he cannot yet recognize the real implications of Humberto's act, his own self-interest as a worker, and the full range of his own choices and responsibilities within that specific work context. By participating in collective process, workers in Cuba gain a great deal of democratic control over the conditions of their day-to-day work life. Humberto clearly chooses separation from that environment, but he is not shown as a "bad" man. He has a certain liar's charm, and the "judgment" against him is calculated to drive him from his isolation, as he gets a sentence of being "watched" for six months by his fellow workers. Mario's behavior is what the film challenges for being socially backward or adolescent--Mario did not tell on Humberto for the right reasons or at the right time. Both the rationality of work relations in an egalitarian work setting and the emotional quality of those relations. are dramatically brought out in this meeting to hear Humberto's case.

In a later sequence, we see these same workers gathered at a bar discussing Mario and Humberto. The nonprofessional actors, factory workers themselves, heatedly get into the fiction because it represents a real issue for them. The major topic of discussion is the relation of the individual to the whole, and the very fact of the emotion invested in this discussion reflects a real urgency felt by the workers to articulate that relation. Statements made include the following: "If you're a revolutionary, you can't ask me to cover for you. The revolution is bigger than both of us." "Why did he speak up so late? He exploded only as a wronged individual and man." "Everyone gets another chance." "He's a rat because he made me do his work while he was living it up."

In fact, both Mario and Yolanda had to learn to grow into and to take their identity from the democratic work structures established by the revolution--a factory council or a collectively-working school faculty. And this growth had to be both intellectual and emotional. What their colleagues demonstrate to be a "rational" way of conducting work relations is also a judgmental and pressuring knowledge that makes demands on Mario and Yolanda to change. Yolanda's co-workers criticize her for a lack of sympathy and emotional understanding toward parents and one pupil, a delinquent boy, Lazaro, and she is then encouraged by a correctional institution advisor to enter into an emotional relation with that boy, which she does.

There is a central role given to direct, personal, political criticism--from the folksinger Guillermo Diaz's song demanding that his audience leave a slum environment and the old habits learned there, to the confrontation Yolanda faces from her fellow teachers. These sequences in the film indicate a whole attitude toward social change in Cuba which is very different from what we experience in or expect from public institutions in the United States.

Rather than look at conflict as merely painful or disruptive or seeing it as something that can or should be contained, dialectical thought looks at all phenomena, natural and social, in terms of ongoing internal process and built-in change. From Hegel to Mao, Marxists have developed the concepts of *contradiction* and *negation* to explain differentiation and the emergence of the new. No natural or social phenomenon is a unified entity, but within it there is always an internal development of various incompatible aspects of the phenomenon, the "struggle" of which leads to transformation and the emergence either of a new stage or a new entity. One aspect or term of a contradiction, as emphasized by Mao, is always stronger and growing in force. In the incompatible development of two necessarily related entities (e.g., labor and capital) or in the contradictory aspects of a single phenomenon (e.g., the conflicting feelings a woman has toward her work in the domestic sphere), there is always movement--proceeding from negation, repeated conflicts, and Reaction against the past--toward something new. There is always a becoming, always a transformation in progress.

One of the main contradictions explored in ONE WAY OR ANOTHER is between individualism and collectivity, between the private and public spheres, between "me" and the collective "you." But this conflict is not presented as occurring between clearly opposed sides or separate individuals, like good guys versus bad guys. Rather, as is

posited in the Marxist theory of dialectics, the opposing terms of a contradiction reciprocally interact with each other, indeed interpenetrate each other, and are transformed into each other.

Because social process is understood in terms of contradiction and transformation and because *revolution* means to Cubans to attempt to guide that process directly, open criticism is presented in ONE WAY OR ANOTHER as a way of acknowledging everyone's right, collectively pursued, to shape their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. On the personal level, to us such criticism may seem harsh or manipulative or, if we have been well socialized as women, just not "nice." Corporate liberals speak of conflict management. In contrast to the general attitude here, both the characters in ONE WAY AND ANOTHER and the film as a whole bring conflicts out in the open, with the sense that directly confronting a problem will and should effectively sharpen the terms of the contradiction. The fact that Cuba's marginal population has an outlook and way of life that often inhibits it from integration into the revolution is not hidden but is the topic of a film made within that revolution.

Similarly the film confronts machismo, especially the hallowed code of manly honor. In fact, in its effect in Cuba, the part of the film that struck audiences the most, indeed a sequence that was literally continued in other bars and cafes, was the sequence where the workers discussed whether or not Mario denounced Humberto too late. The politics of whether or not one should betray a friendship at work became, because of this film, a matter of open public debate.

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER depicts the interpenetration of the public and private spheres, of people's personal lives and public demands made on them, in a far more subtle and complex way than merely presenting criticism sessions. The film treats its two protagonists gently. They are shown as two adults whom those around them assume can and want to change. By implication, all adults in a revolutionary culture are faced with the task of transforming themselves personally. The film portrays a realistic context in which peers both challenge and nurture each other to grow into new social roles. The teachers in Yolanda's school say their job is to give affection to the students and to "parent" the parents as well.

Similarly, there is a reversal of the generation conflict in Mario's family. In most cases, it is youth who advocate the new and disdain parents for clinging to the old. Here, Mario's parents, who are community leaders, patiently wait for their son to take his place in the revolution. He had moved from street urchin to the army to factory work. The parents had already seen Mario change a lot since the revolution. They understood his situation within the context of seeing everyone in their neighborhood being asked to grow into new ways. After the incident with the factory council, we see Mario at home with his father, who opens the blinds in the morning to let the sun in and makes his son a cup of coffee. Mario sits slumped at the table, head down. "I'm all messed up," Mario complains. "You were before, but not now," replies the father, ending this brief sequence. The film then cuts to a wrecking ball demolishing a slum building, a shot repeated throughout the film symbolic of the whole process of social change.

Criticism, art, work, social participation, and love are all shown in the film as avenues to new understanding. Characters interact with each other and influence each other profoundly. The film shows how on a deeply personal level, the Cuban revolution has demanded that people struggle against alienation, false consciousness, and old compulsive ways. As political contradictions are worked out by the characters in the film, the domestic and personal sphere is revealed as the place where individuals struggle to know what they want, and this struggle is always incomplete.

It is in this sense that I see ONE WAY OR ANOTHER as a feminist film. Realistically, the public sphere as depicted in the film is still predominantly male, and perhaps also realistically, Yolanda is presented mainly in terms of her emotional roles. I wish that the film had focused more on a mother/daughter relation, delineating the role of that relation in the revolutionary process as well. In fact, the film's "feminism" lies in the way that it attributes sincere emotional interactions to its male characters and considers a profound and sincere emotional life important for men's, especially Mario's, revolutionary development. Humberto's transgression comes from his abuse of sexuality and trust as well as from skipping work. Lazaro's mother--her pathos, dependency, and limited outlook--represents another vision of the kind of woman whom Humberto thought was so much "fun," and her life is the consequence of that male attitude toward sexual relations.

Far beyond their relation to men, the film shows these previously "marginal" women as needing to develop themselves as many-sided persons and as "counting" as members of the community. The delinquent mothers whom Yolanda challenges are no different in economic origins than Mario's own parents but have persisted in self-deprecating and negative concepts of their own role. The courts say they cannot change the parents, but Yolanda's co-workers insist that these are the people who must be worked with. Sadly, it is the mothers, not Mario or even Humberto, who are the real '*marginales*' persisting after the revolution. These women explain realistically to the camera that they cannot cope with the "double day" of working and raising children alone; but the limitation of the film's imaginative scope is that it does not deal more with what is perhaps the material basis of these women's narrow range of social concern--not enough money and/or daycare and, physically, just plain overwork--nor does it indicate, as it does with Mario and Humberto, how these women's limited social perspective might be overcome.

Cinematic structures and relation to audience:

The second way that ONE WAY OR ANOTHER explicitly clarifies the relation between ideas and historical and social reality is in its cinematic art.⁶ The cinematic structures and filmic tactics are components of the signifier that clarify the forms or structures of the signified, i.e., real social structures existent in Cuba today. As I will demonstrate, the film's form elucidates the real, urgent political implications in Cuban life of certain modes of discourse, certain ways of thinking, and certain ways of approaching social and personal problems, Gomez offers the film as an imaginary, intellectual, and emotional "construct" to the audience which is potentially a model for understanding contemporary Cuban society from the vantage point or perspective of the individual self.

As Bertell Ollman has pointed out, Marx's *Capital*, Volume One, demonstrates two of the most important features of the dialectical method. First, each structure Marx posits and labels with a noun, such as *value* or *labor* or *productive forces*, is really a term that also means a verb, i.e., a whole social, historical, and economic process, and by implication refers to and includes within it all the relations inherent in that process. It also includes its negation as its own "other." (To define "capital" is also to define "labor" and the historical and necessary relation of the two.) Similarly, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER asks us to consider both "individualism" and the "individual" as phenomena and to understand them dialectically from the perspective of history, class, and collectivity as well as from the dramatic perspective of the life of unique characters. The personal changes the characters encounter are presented as being as much a part of "slum clearance" as is any public planning or housing construction.

The second feature of *Capital* described by Ollman is Marx's ability to "chunk" information in many different ways, to see factors worth considering as coming from all walks of life, to incorporate analyses from every possible level of human thought and experience, to view things and their relations not as fixed but as changing, to alter his classificational boundaries and manipulate the "size" of the factors under consideration to suit his changing purpose or point of emphasis, and not to deal in mutually exclusive categories.

In the cinematic structure of ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, Sara Gomez does the same thing. She switches modes of cinematic discourse and, among the characters in their dialogue, modes of social discourse. This tactic leads the audience to think about the political effectiveness or implications of each of these ways of imparting information. She groups the characters in widely varying ways. She shows us very different social perspectives on urban space. In each instance her purpose is similar to Bertolt Brecht's in his plays. Each sequence in the film emphasizes the social context of the characters' emotions, decisions, and lives, and the drama illustrates in return the dynamics of real social change.

As a film, as a work of art, the relation between signifier and signified in ONE WAY OR ANOTHER offers a fine example of dialectical exposition; furthermore, the relation between film and audience provides a concrete example of the function of dialectical art. In its structure, the film alternates between different kinds of sequences. These include the following: relatively short fictional sequences following Mario and Yolanda in and out of their social roles and in various situations and locales; documentary sequences explaining slum life, slum clearance, and the new neighborhoods where previous slum dwellers now live and where remnants of their old culture and habits which are "marginal" to the revolution still persist; historical sequences of the growth of the "voodoo" or Abacus society and a contemporary Abacus ritual; and both fictional and documentary footage relating the story of real-life boxer and singer, Guillermo Diaz.

Over the documentary sections, a commentary states the official view of marginal culture and describes the problems marginality has created for the revolution. The speaker has a flat, unemotional voice and the text uses a kind of formal sociological language. Most of the time this voice-over commentary offers an accurate summary of

what we see in the film of people's lives, but it is also pompous and grating. Such an irritating tone serves as an ironic commentary on the political limitations of this kind of discourse in effecting real change in ordinary people's daily lives.

Much of the film shows people talking. And this lively talk is the counterpoint to the pedantic but realistic voice-over commentary. The film wants us to think of conversation as a process and to note the relation between what people say, where it comes from, and where it leads to. In the filmed workers' council meeting, at the men's domino game, and at the bar, everyone has something to say. There are also intense, intimate conversations and gentle, laughing ones with father, mother, lover, and same-sex friends. The quality of the talk, the things talked about the occasions that provoke such conversations or formal explanations--all these are clearly delineated in the film as part of specific social situations and coming from people who have specific histories, especially definite class backgrounds.

Similarly, the film juxtaposes and has various filmic ways of presenting different kinds of events and locales. The film constructs and elaborates in detail units on a personally observable scale and of a personally appealing kind: a love relation, gentle moments in family life, work relations, building up a new neighborhood by volunteer labor, a workers' council meeting, a teacher's relation to students and parents, a bar, a singer playing a song at his home and at a concert. The various locales that are presented are related to this "humanized" scale, this personal space; and many larger processes are indicated but not directly, or perhaps only schematically, seen (e.g., the army, revolution, work processes and routines, and the actual slum clearance).

Personal space is understood from the context of history, and the revolution is seen from the perspective of daily life. Thus, the new neighborhoods are first shown with goats in them, indicating the continuance of marginal culture in a new environment; and then these same neighborhoods are seen with Mario and Yolanda's participating in their cleanup and beautification. Not only do we evaluate all spaces in terms of the characters we have come to know best, but the opposite is also true. Both we and the film evaluate the major characters and their conflicts in terms of the extension of their lives into the past and the future, their relation to established social structures, and their relation to a specific geographic and social space.

To show some of the interrelations between the commentary, the characters' lives, and the types of language and situations used to develop a specific problem in the film, we can look at the film's approach to spiritualism as a social force and as a religious belief. Mario, in the first long conversation we see him having with Yolanda, shows her an area that used to be a slum, the area he grew up in. He said that he thought then of becoming a *nañigo*, an Abacua society priest, but that his life had been changed too much by the revolution, boarding school, and the army. "Well, you cannot become a *nañigo* then," Yolanda responds laughingly. "Why not?" demands Mario, thinking his range of choices is being challenged by her. "Mentality," she answers enigmatically. "What?" "You just said that you have a different outlook now," she jokes and runs up the hill. It seems the first time anyone has challenged Mario to consider directly how much he has in fact changed.

The film then presents a documentary history of the Abacua society and notes how it perpetuates a myth of woman-as- arch-betrayer and therefore maintains a code of male supremacy. The voice-over here takes a strong political stand that none of the characters themselves can take, since Mario's mother herself, although an active participant in the revolutionary neighborhood organizations, still maintains an altar of statues and "saints" in her house. As a matter of fact, at no time in the film do any of the characters make such strong statements to each other about required change--even though their criticisms of each other are direct and emotionally intense. Emphatically, the voice over the visual depiction of Abacua rituals states the following:

"We believe that its traditional, secret, exclusive nature sets it against progress and prevents it from assimilating the values of modern life. Therefore, in its present stage, it generates marginality, promoting a code of parallel social relations that is the antithesis of social integration."

Because of the unusual use of the word "we" in the discourse and because of the strength of the condemnation, this seems to be Gomez's own view. The exposition of this aspect of Mario's past partly explains why he clings to codes of honor and manhood. We do not doubt this "explanation" nor that the Abacua religious society is politically regressive. Yet the character Yolanda is closer than the voice-over commentary in understanding how it is that people change and move away from such a regressive structure and mode of thought. The revolution will provide people, if they wish, with another kind of *mentalidad*.

The film both gives a political prescription on the Abacus society and looks gently and nurturally at how such things as religious participation and belief are worked out, in contradictory ways, in the characters' lives. As a cultural artifact of a revolutionary society, the film also plays a role in changing people's lives. Gently it asks people, especially men, to give up old ways, and it does that from a wise parent's or friend's understanding of why people are where they are and what steps they can reasonably be pushed to take.

Dialectical thinking not only presents us with a series of interrelated factors, but it shows differences, connections, transitions, negations, and transformations between those factors. Dialectics also makes clear the levels, interconnections, and transitions between the *concepts* one uses to present and explain the various aspects of social reality. In the film, Yolanda and Mario are often filmed in group situations in documentary-style long-shots, which are edited together with real portraits of Havana life. Furthermore, Mario's father is played by a real-life community activist who has worked for years to transform the slums, as has Guillermo Diaz. These two figures are seen in sequences that could be historical newsreel footage or could be fictional sequences, created in these neighborhoods just for this film. The "reality" of the fictional characters' environment comes from a real urban neighborhood, confirming that the two protagonists' emotional development could be that of many other people there today.

Significantly, Lazaro and his mother are not actors. The mother tells this boy's and her own pathetic story to the world for the sake of this film. In the United States such a use of cinema verite for the sake of a fiction would strike me as exploitative, but in the context of this film, that the mother relates her story to the camera seems a positive social act. In a society which has class inequalities structurally built into it, naturalistic art which presents the plight of the poor can only offer us pathos to be consumed, since the society itself refuses a certain kind of change. In Cuba, in spite of severe poverty, there is a hope for change and an effort to promote that change. Thus this mother's telling her story is not a declaration of mere pathos but a sincere expression that both she and the filmmakers hope will lead to positive social change.

Similarly, but in another cinematic mode, the sensationalistic story of Guillermo Diaz's losing his boxing career because he killed a man hanging around his fiancée is presented in the film in stylized melodramatic form. In the old days, it was a lurid tale coloring all of the man's life. Now when the society has a sense of how people can and should change and how they can contribute to social process, Diaz is an esteemed member of his community and a touchstone of value in the film. The episode is no longer anything to be ashamed about but a factual part of the past.

In the context of its goals as socialist art, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER refuses to contribute to segmented knowledge and segmented existence. It shows that a knowledge of a key aspect of Cuban life, marginality, must not be parceled into a sociological discourse available primarily to an elite, even though that discourse contains some of the truth. The individuals in the film are shown in terms of real needs that people in any audience can identify with. The film also refers to a concrete reality in Cuba, and in treating a specific problem, it gives the audience imaginative and conceptual tools to look at extensions of these problems in their own lives--namely, love, "honor," and marginality. Because of the many modes of filmic discourse and ways of presenting information and emotion, the film shows us ways to look at thought and emotion in terms of change and movement and social context. The film's ideas are "full" because they give audiences--especially Cubans, who have given a general assent to revolutionary process--an impulse to more aware and more loving social action and courage to try something new or modify what had previously been done unthinkingly.

In intellectual terms, the film provides a political contribution about how to go about thinking dialectically. It is not just the "single-voiced" story of Mario and Yolanda's love. The narrative fragmentation is not obscure. The visual and audio disjunctures do have interconnections, understandable in political and social terms. In thinking through these interconnections for themselves, the audience members are being asked to create social meaning: about the characters, about the relation between fiction and documentary, about modes of discourse, about marginal life and culture, and about the relation of the personal and emotional to the political and public sphere. The creativity involved in receiving the film, the creativity demanded by the film's structure and content, thus involves the audience in an experience in understanding the dynamics of social change.

Historical reality is inside us as well as around us, and it is created by what goes on inside us emotionally as well as by our will. To grasp the "idea" or principle behind appearances is to be more involved in history than not to do so. When we see social and conceptual structures and their interconnection and their movement, we can fully see our own choices and areas of responsibility and can act in accordance with both reality and the potential of our own fullest being. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER sees its characters as both individual and historical and shows them as becoming more and more conscious of the choices they can and do make.

One of the principles of dialectics is that altered relations change the terms and direction of the argument, that they enable an entity to do new things in a way not done before. Feminist art has as its goal altering our understanding of, making more conscious, and actually transforming the relations between the public and the private sphere. Power relations are not directly changed by art, but when the feminist sensibility articulated in contemporary art is tied to a movement for social change, it is the capacity to make criticisms, to recognize oneself for the position one is really in, and to imagine real alternatives that women's art serves. And it is this self-awareness and imaginative capacity that is both prerequisite and essential component of revolutionary and, in dialectical terms, historically appropriate and necessary social change.

NOTES:

1. For a Marxist reading of Hegel and an explicit discussion of dialectics, see the following: V. I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks, Collected Works*, vol. 38 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972); Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968); Lefebvre, *Logique formelle, Logique dialectique* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1947); Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, trans. N. Guterman (New York: Random-Vintage, 1968). [back](#)

2. Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Concept of Man in Capitalist Society*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1976). It is extremely disappointing that in the second edition of *Alienation* Ollman neither changed the generic use of "man" nor discussed why he failed to do so. He did write new material to respond to critics of the first edition, and significantly he does not use the generic "man" to stand for both men and women in the text of those revisions. The fact that he has changed his own later writing style means that he cannot be ignorant of the issues at stake, but he does not at any point in this new edition acknowledge the women's movement or the intellectual insights it has engendered. Furthermore, he emphasizes the key role of language and terminology in Marx's writings and states that the "relational sense Marx gives to social entities has some basis in the German language which readers of the English version of his work necessarily miss"; at the same time, Ollman does not discuss whether "man" is the most accurate or appropriate English concept for a key Marxist term, *man* or *Mensch* in German being more commonly translated as "one," "person," or "human." Furthermore, clinging to the term "man" weakens Ollman's entire argument about alienation itself. He offers a particularly weak discussion of ideology, neglecting as he does women's socialization and the role of the family in the reproduction of production

relations. Since this book is a key text in English on the theory of dialectics, its political failings, which become serious intellectual failings, hurt us all. [back](#)

3. Lenin, "Conspectus of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 93. [back](#)

4. Lenin, p. 212. [back](#)

5. Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Essays* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1952). [back](#)

6. In its inconsistent exposure and excessive graininess, this black-and-white film sometimes looks like a work print that falls drastically short of the high production values we usually associate with Cuban film. Some of this graininess is deliberately used to capture a documentary "feel," especially in the sequences where Mario's father or Guillermo Diaz are shown as community leaders, presumably in past times in the former slum. After Sara Gomez shot and edited this film in 16mm, the original negative was damaged in processing, and it took two years in labs in Sweden to restore the footage to its current state. Tragically, Sara Gomez died shortly after editing the film, and associates Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Rigoberto Lopez supervised the sound-mix and post-production stages of preparing ONE WAY OR ANOTHER for theatrical release. [back](#)